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THE CONTRIBUTION OF ARCHERY TO THE TURKISH CONQUEST OF ANATOLIA

By WALTER EMIL KAEGI, JR

ONE of the most important tasks for Byzantine historians is the explanation of the Byzantine loss of Anatolia to the Seljuk Turks in the second half of the eleventh century. In 1050 the peninsula seemed to be the firm keystone of the Byzantine Empire; the Byzantines had been defending it successfully against the Arabs since the seventh century. By the accession of Alexius Comnenus to the emperorship in 1081 the Seljuks had overrun most of Anatolia. The apparent ease and rapidity of this Seljuk victory has surprised scholars and stimulated considerable research. Many internal political, economic, and social factors have been found responsible for the collapse of Byzantine military resistance: factional quarrels of the Byzantine civil bureaucracy and military leadership, civil wars for the imperial throne, excessive reliance upon costly and disloyal foreign mercenary troops, gradual absorption of the vital native peasant-soldier land holdings by the landed aristocracy, and official intolerance and active persecution of non-orthodox (especially Armenian) subjects.¹

An additional factor of considerable importance has not been investigated: the decisive advantage often given to the Turks by their skillful use of the bow and arrow. The Seljuks preferred the bow to other weapons; Byzantine sources attribute numerous Turkish victories to the dexterity of the Seljuks with the bow.²

Numerous difficulties confront the historian endeavoring to study any aspect of Byzantine-Seljuk warfare. No official Byzantine battle reports are extant. Most Byzantine and Armenian historians were relatively uninformed about the military situation on the distant eastern and southern frontiers; often they were simply not interested in military affairs. Most of them did not personally observe the warfare between Byzantine and Turk, let alone participate in it. Their descriptions of the fighting are frequently vague. Astonished by the sudden collapse of the Empire's defenses, these historians sought to find a contemporary scapegoat.

¹ On the general problem of eleventh-century Byzantine decline, see: Speros Vryonis, "Byzantium: the Social Basis of Decline," *Greek-Roman and Byzantine Studies*, II (1959), 157-175; Peter Charanis, "The Byzantine Empire in the Eleventh Century," *A History of the Crusades*, I, ed. K. M. Setton and M. A. Baldwin (Philadelphia, 1956), 177-219; R. J. H. Jenkins, *The Byzantine Empire on the Eve of the Crusades*, Pamphlet G-24 in the General Series of the Historical Association (London, 1953); Claude Cahen, "La Première pénétration turque en Asie Mineure," *Byzantion*, XVIII (1948), 5-67; Paul Wittek, "Deux chapitres de l'histoire des Turcs de Roum," *Byzantion*, XI (1936), 285-319; J. Laurent, *Byzance et les Turcs seljoucides dans l'Asie occidentale jusqu'en 1081* (Nancy, 1913); and Carl Neumann, *Die Weltstellung des byzantinischen Reiches vor den Kreuzzügen* (Leipzig, 1894). For a more extensive bibliography on the Seljuks, see Gyula Moravcsik, *Byzantinoturcica*, I, 2nd. ed. (Berlin, 1958), 318-319.

² The importance of the bow and arrow in the Seljuk army is discussed by A. K. S. Lambton, "Contributions to the Study of Seljûq Institutions" (unpublished 1939 dissertation at the University of London), pp. 138-139. A satisfactory general discussion of Seljuk military tactics from Latin sources is found in R. C. Smail, *Crusading Warfare, 1097-1193* (Cambridge, England, 1956), pp. 80-82.

Some of these writers, for example, dedicated their works to contemporary emperors; such authors naturally blamed military defeats upon the predecessors of the present rulers.³ Armenian writers, filled with religious and national animosity toward the orthodox Byzantines, ascribed the loss of Anatolia to the personal baseness, avarice, impiety, and bigotry of certain emperors.⁴ These Byzantine and Armenian historians, however, usually included information indicating that other factors also contributed to the Turkish conquest.

The principal Byzantine sources for this essay are: the *History of the Wars* composed by the sixth-century historian, Procopius of Caesarea;⁵ the history composed in the tenth century by Joseph Genesius;⁶ an anonymous tenth-century continuation of the chronicle of the monk, Theophanes;⁷ the manual of military tactics written by the Emperor Leo VI the Wise (886–912);⁸ the history of Michael Attaliates, an important eleventh-century Byzantine official;⁹ the history written by the Caesar Nicephorus Bryennius during the first quarter of the twelfth century.¹⁰ The most useful Armenian sources include *The History of Armenia* composed by Aristakis of Lastiverd after 1071,¹¹ and, more important, the *Chronicle* of Matthew of Edessa, who recorded events up to 1136.¹²

The most valuable of these works for this essay is definitely the history of Michael Attaliates. This historian was an influential military judge during the critical reigns of Emperors Romanus IV Diogenes (1067–1071) and Michael VII (1071–1078) when the Seljuks successfully occupied virtually all of Anatolia. Attaliates participated in campaigns against the Seljuks in Asia, advised Emperor Romanus; in Europe he served in the wars against the Pecheneg raiders. In recording his narrative he had the benefit of personal observation and experience in the field and access to the most authoritative written and unwritten official sources. He wrote his account during the years 1079 and 1080 while the events were still fresh in his memory. The result is a narrative containing details of mili-

³ See the introductory remarks of Michael Attaliates to his *Historia*, I. Bekker ed. (Bonn, 1853), pp. 3–4. Also note the preface of Nicephorus Bryennius, *Commentarii*, A. Meineke, ed. (Bonn, 1836), pp. 6–16.

⁴ Matthieu d'Edesse, *Chronique*, E. Dulaurier trans. (Paris, 1858), p. 113.

⁵ *Procopius with an English Translation*, H. B. Dewing ed. and trans., Loeb Classical Library, 7 vols. (London, and Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1913–1940). For a detailed study and recent bibliography on Procopius, see the article by Berthold Rubin, "Prokopios von Kaisareia," *Paulys Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*,¹ xxiii, Part 1 (Stuttgart, 1957), cols. 273–599.

⁶ Joseph Genesius, *Regna*, C. Lachmann ed. (Bonn, 1834). For information on Genesius, see Moravcsik, *Byzantinoturcica*, I, ed. cit., 318–319.

⁷ *Historia*, I. Bekker ed. (Bonn, 1838). See Moravcsik, *Byzantinoturcica*, I, 540–544. For the relationship of this chronicle with the history of Genesius, see the important article by F. Barišić, "Génésios et le continuateur de Théophane," *Byzantion*, xxviii (1958), 119–133.

⁸ Leo, *Tactica*, R. Vari ed., 2 vols. (Budapest, 1917). See Moravcsik, *Byzantinoturcica*, I, 400–409.

⁹ Michael Attaliates, *Historia*, I. Bekker ed. (Bonn, 1853). See Moravcsik, *Byzantinoturcica*, I, 427–428. A new edition and translation is being prepared by Henri Grégoire.

¹⁰ Nicephorus Bryennius, *Commentarii*, A. Meineke ed. (Bonn, 1836). See Moravcsik, *Byzantinoturcica*, I, 443–444.

¹¹ Aristakis of Lastiverd, *Histoire d'Arménie*, E. Prud'homme trans. (Paris, 1858).

¹² Matthieu d'Edesse, *Chronique*, E. Dulaurier trans. (Paris, 1858).

tary clashes that other Byzantine historians mention, if at all, in very general terms.¹³ On the other hand, his criticisms of certain Byzantine emperors were probably exaggerated, since his avowed purpose in writing this history was to glorify the achievements of the contemporary emperor, Nicephorus III Botaniates.¹⁴

II

The mounted archer played a critical role in early Byzantine history. The skillful use of the bow and arrow by Justinian's cavalry was one of the most decisive factors contributing to the great Byzantine victories in the West during the sixth century. The historian Procopius related that no less authoritative an expert than the commander Belisarius attributed his successes over the Ostrogoths in Italy to his employment of mounted archers:

... in engaging with them [the Ostrogoths] at the first with only a few men he had noticed just what the difference was between the two armies, so that if he should fight his battles with them with a force which was in strength proportionate to theirs, the multitudes of the enemy could inflict no injury upon the Romans by reason of the smallness of their numbers. And the difference was this, that practically all the Romans and their allies, the Huns, are good mounted bowmen, but not a man among the Goths has had practice in this branch, for their horsemen are accustomed to use only spears and swords, while their bowmen enter battle on foot and under cover of the heavy-armed men. So the horsemen, unless the engagement is at close quarters, have no means of defending themselves against opponents who use the bow, and therefore can easily be reached by the arrows and destroyed; and as for the footsoldiers, they can never be strong enough to make sallies against men on horseback.¹⁵

Procopius from his own considerable combat experience believed that the appearance of the mounted archer in the Byzantine army constituted a very significant and radical innovation in warfare. He admired the horse archers and declared that they were not at all inferior to the warriors of antiquity: "they are expert horsemen, and are able without difficulty to direct their bows to either side while riding at full speed, and to shoot an opponent whether in pursuit or in flight."¹⁶

Contemporary writers attribute two very important Italian victories by Justinian's army to the skillful employment of mounted archers. Justinian's general, Narses, virtually annihilated the Ostrogothic army under King Totila at Busta Gallorum in northern Italy during the year 552. The Byzantine mounted archers shot down from a distance the Ostrogothic horsemen, who were armed only with spears; the Ostrogothic cavalry were destroyed before they could make contact.¹⁷ Two years later, in 554, Narses wiped out an invading horde of Alamanni under their chieftain, Butilinus. Again Byzantine mounted archers were responsible for

¹³ See the comments of Karl Krumbacher, *Geschichte der byzantinischen Litteratur von Justinian bis zum Ende des oströmischen Reiches (527-1453)*, 2nd. ed. (Munich, 1897), pp. 269-271.

¹⁴ Michael Attaliates, *Historia*, pp. 3-4.

¹⁵ Procopius, *History*, V. xxvii, 26-28; H. B. Dewing trans. III, 259-261.

¹⁶ Procopius, *History*, I. i. 14; H. B. Dewing trans., I, 7.

¹⁷ Procopius, *History*, VIII. xxxii. 7-10; H. B. Dewing trans., v, 376-379.

the Byzantine victory. The Alamanni were simply unable to devise tactics to cope with the rapid-firing, constantly moving horse archers.¹⁸

The mounted archer appears to have remained the most important figure in the Byzantine army during the last decades of the sixth century.¹⁹

III

Lack of adequate sources makes it difficult to evaluate the quality and importance of Byzantine mounted archery in the seventh and eighth centuries. Events occurring in the first half of the ninth century, however, indicate that the Byzantines had failed to maintain their skill at mounted archery. Furthermore, it is extremely important to note that the Byzantine weakness at mounted archery was exposed by a new adversary, the Turks from the steppes of Central Asia. Indeed, the decisive Seljuk victories over the Byzantines in the eleventh century seem less remarkable if one studies the interesting but hitherto neglected record of the first significant military encounter between Byzantines and Turks in the first half of the ninth century.

The 'Abbāsid Caliph Mu'taṣim (833–842) was the first caliph to recruit a large personal army of Turkish slaves from the Central Asian steppes. He hired these Turks to counterbalance his unruly and excessively powerful Khurasanian Arab troops. An elite corps of very skillful mounted archers, the Turks soon became a dominant force in Baghdad politics. Constant friction between them and the Baghdad populace compelled the caliph to move, with these Turks, to a new capital at Samarra in 836.²⁰ In the following year, 837, the Byzantine Emperor Theophilus (829–842) successfully stormed the Muslim fortress of Zapetra; Mu'taṣim personally undertook a campaign of reprisal during the summer of 838.²¹ The Byzantine historian Joseph Genesius carefully recorded that the caliph included up to 10,000 Turks in this expeditionary force.²²

Mu'taṣim's immediate aim was to capture Amorion, the largest city in the important Anatolic theme and the birthplace of Theophilus' dynasty.²³ The caliph divided his army into three columns. The division led by the able general Afshin of Ushrūshana²⁴ pushed to the town of Dazimon deep in Byzantine Anatolia.²⁵

¹⁸ Agathias, *Historiae*, II.9, L. Dindorf ed. in *Historici graeci minores*, II (Leipzig, 1871), 193–195.

¹⁹ F. Aussaresses, *L'Armée byzantine à la fin du VI^e siècle* (Paris, 1909), pp. 51–52. Also, E. Darko, "Influences touraniennes sur l'évolution de l'art militaire des Grecs, des Romains et des Byzantins," *Byzantion*, x (1935), 443–469; xii (1937) 119–147; "Le rôle des peuples nomades cavaliers dans la transformation de l'Empire romain aux premiers siècles du moyen âge," *Byzantion*, xviii (1948), 85–97.

²⁰ W. Muir, *The Caliphate: Its Rise, Decline and Fall from Original Sources*, 2nd. ed. (London, 1924), p. 513; A. Müller, *Der Islam im Morgen- und Abendland*, I (Berlin, 1885), 520–521; E. Herzfeld, *Geschichte der Stadt Samarra in Die Ausgrabungen von Samarra*, vi (Berlin, 1948), 91–101.

²¹ A. A. Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, I, rev. and trans. by M. Canard and H. Grégoire (Brussels, 1935), 137–143; J. B. Bury, *A History of the Eastern Roman Empire* (London, 1912), pp. 263 ff.

²² Joseph Genesius, *Regna*, C. Lachmann ed. (Bonn, 1834), p. 67.

²³ A. A. Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, I, 145 ff.

²⁴ W. Barthold and H. A. R. Gibb, "Afshin," *Encyclopædia of Islam*, I, 2nd. ed. (Leiden and London, 1960), 241.

²⁵ For the location of Dazimon, see A. A. Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, I, 148 n. 5.

Near this town, at a mountain called "Anzen," Afshīn engaged the emperor in the decisive battle of the campaign on 22 July 838.²⁶

Three Byzantine historians—Joseph Genesius, the anonymous continuator of Theophanes, and George Cedrenus — give almost identical accounts of this engagement.²⁷ According to them, the battle began at dawn. The Byzantine cavalry quickly routed the Arab troops and began to pursue them. The Turkish archers were the only Muslims to stand firm. The balance appeared to have shifted decisively in favor of the Byzantines when these Turkish archers intervened to reverse the outcome. Continuously shooting their arrows, they successfully repulsed the Byzantine troops, who were unable to penetrate the hail of missiles to engage the Turks at close quarters. The Turks, together with the Arabs whom they rallied, finally routed the Byzantine troops, who abandoned the Emperor Theophilus and a small bodyguard on the battlefield.²⁸

Afshīn's soldiers briefly surrounded Theophilus and his guards. The manner in which the emperor and his men escaped is significant, for it emphasizes once more the importance of the Turkish archers. The Byzantine sources explain that a heavy rain suddenly fell and relaxed the bowstrings of the Turks. The chronicler George Cedrenus adds that all of the men with the emperor would have perished had it not been for night and this rain.²⁹ No other known sources mention this decisive role of the Turks, although some writers do mention that a heavy rain did stop the battle.³⁰

Since most of the Byzantine army had been destroyed at Dazimon, Mu'taṣim easily marched to Amorion, swiftly captured and sacked it, probably in August of 838.³¹ According to the Arab historian Mas'ūdī, the caliph seriously considered an immediate march upon Constantinople.³² He was unexpectedly called home, however, to quell a conspiracy in favor of his nephew 'Abbās bin Ma'mūn.³³ This ended the immediate danger to the Byzantine empire.

The campaign of 838, although a serious defeat for the Byzantines, had no immediate consequences of importance. Mu'taṣim remained entirely occupied with domestic difficulties until his death in 842. After that date, the power of the caliphate rapidly disintegrated. Various Turkish generals usurped effective power.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 156; Bury, *History of the Eastern Roman Empire*, p. 264.

²⁷ For the dependency of the continuation of Theophanes upon Genesius, see F. Barišić, "Génésios et le continuateur de Théophane," *Byzantion*, xxviii (1958), 119–133. The most important Arab account of the battle was written by Tabarī. His description of the campaign is detailed, but his report of this engagement is very brief. His account is focused upon the movements of Mu'taṣim, who was not present at this battle. Tabarī's short account does not mention the presence of the Turks. See the recent annotated translation by E. Marin, *The Reign of Al-Mu'taṣim*, American Oriental Series, xxxv (New Haven, 1951), p. 66.

²⁸ Genesius, *Regna*, p. 68; Continuation of Theophanes, *Historia*, pp. 127–128; Cedrenus-Skylitzes, *Historiarum compendium*, II, I. Bekker ed. (Bonn, 1839), 133–134.

²⁹ Genesius, *Regna*, p. 68; Continuation of Theophanes, *Historia*, p. 128; Cedrenus-Skylitzes, *Historiarum compendium*, II, 134.

³⁰ Michel le Syrien, *Chronique*, III, Part 1 (Paris, 1905), 95.

³¹ A. A. Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, I, 160–171.

³² Mas'ūdī, *Prairies d'Or*, VII, Barbier de Meynard ed. and trans., 136–137.

³³ A. A. Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, I, 175; W. Muir, *Caliphate*, pp. 512–513.

These generals were fully engaged in attempting to preserve their own positions at Samarra or Baghdad; they had no opportunity to exploit the proven Byzantine vulnerability to expert Turkish archery. The caliph's elite archers remained stationed at the capital or participated in endless civil wars. Mu'tašim was the last caliph to lead a major expedition into Byzantine territory. The successful Byzantine counter-offensive against the caliphate, which began in the second half of the ninth century, really involved fighting local Arab frontier garrisons, not the elite troops stationed at the capital.³⁴

Mu'tašim's expedition of 838 is an important but forgotten landmark in the long record of Byzantine-Turkish conflict. As the first major test of strength between the two antagonists, it strikingly demonstrated that long before the internal Byzantine disintegration of the eleventh century, skilled Turkish archers could score decisive military successes over the imperial armies.

Though the defeat of 838 should have led the Byzantines to develop good archers to cope with those of the Turks, they still remained very weak in archery at the beginning of the tenth century. An extremely reliable official source, the Emperor Leo VI ("the Wise"), declared in his manual of military tactics "Since archery has wholly been neglected and has fallen into disuse among the Romans (Byzantines) the many present reverses are wont to take place." Leo's statement should not be taken to mean that there were no archers at all in the Byzantine army; in his tactical manual he devotes considerable space to maneuvers requiring archers. It is much more likely that he meant that, generally speaking, the quality of Byzantine archery was very poor in his own day in comparison with the skillful handling of the bow in earlier periods of Byzantine history such as the sixth century (Leo was well acquainted with sixth-century Byzantine military tactics). He did not offer an explanation for this decline of Byzantine archery. Since he understood that the quality of the army's archery could affect its fortune in battle he recommended archery practice strongly.³⁵ It is uncertain whether Leo personally succeeded in bringing up Byzantine archery to his standards, but archers were available for campaigns during the second half of the tenth century when the empire won numerous victories over its foreign adversaries and achieved its maximum power.³⁶

The Byzantine army entered a period of serious deterioration after the death of Basil II in 1025. The sources speak in general terms of decline in army morale, number of troops, and in the quality of their training and equipment.³⁷ It re-

³⁴ For general accounts of the Caliphate's rapid decay: Muir, *Caliphate*, pp. 523 ff.; Herzfeld *Geschichte der Stadt Samarra*, pp. 160 ff. The Byzantine counter-offensive is generally considered to have begun with the decisive victory of the general Petronas in 863 over Arab frontier troops; on this subject see A. A. Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, I, 249 ff. The Arab sources cited by Vasiliev indicate that the Muslim troops defeated at this engagement were local frontier garrison soldiers.

³⁵ Leo deplored the state of Byzantine archery, *Tactica*, I, R. Vari ed. (Budapest, 1917), 103. General recommendations to improve the quality of archery are found on pp. 99-103 of the same volume.

³⁶ Scriptor Incertus, *Liber de re militari*, R. Vari ed. (Leipzig, 1901), pp. 1, 2, 11, 13, 15, 19, 21, 30-31, 36 and 44. Also Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De ceremoniis*, Migne, *P.G.*, cxii, 1220.

³⁷ Attaliates, *Historia*, pp. 79, 103; Nicephorus Bryennius, *Commentarii*, p. 31; Cedrenus-Skylitzes, *Historiarum compendium*, II, 652.

quires constant practice to maintain facility with a bow, especially if used while mounted; it is likely that the general decay of the army's training and lack of weapons was injurious to the practice of Byzantine archery.

IV

The first advance signs of a Seljuk Turkish threat to Byzantine Anatolia did not appear until the second decade of the eleventh century. At that time, Turkish nomads, having swept across northern Iran from Transoxania, began to raid some of the independent and semi-independent Armenian principalities bordering the Byzantine empire on the East. The Armenian kingdom of Vaspurakan, ruled by the Bagratid dynasty and lying between Lakes Van and Urmia, felt the first shock of these raiders. In 1021 King Senacherim dispatched his son Davith with troops to oppose the invaders. Matthew of Edessa has left a description of the ensuing battle which ascribes a decisive role to the high quality of the Turkish archery:

A terrible battle commenced between the two armies. Up to then, Turk cavalry had never been seen. The Armenians facing the enemy saw those men with their strange appearance, armed with bows and with hair flowing like women. They were not accustomed to protect themselves against the arrows of those infidels and nevertheless they charged with bare swords. Those brave men, advancing as heroes, massacred a great number of Turks. The Turks, for their part, hit many of the Armenians with arrows. At the sight of this, Shapuh [Armenian general] said to Davith: 'O King, retreat, because a large portion of our men have been wounded by arrows. Let us withdraw and put on our armor to resist the arms that we see in the enemy's hands and to protect us from their arrows, . . . [Davith continued to fight for a while, but finally retired with Shapuh. They reported to the King.] They told King Senacherim how the infidels were equipped. This report so distressed that prince that he stopped eating and abandoned himself, in deep meditation, to the greatest sorrow. He spent whole sleepless nights ceaselessly occupied with the examination of the times and the words of the seers, oracles of God, and the holy doctors. He found in the books that the epoch was marked for the irruption of the Turks and he knew that the destruction and end of the world were imminent.³⁸

Parts of this passage have often been cited, yet no one appears to have pointed out the critical contribution of the bowmen to the Turkish success. The sword-wielding Armenians, accustomed to fighting at close quarters, were unprepared to engage archers on horseback who could shoot them down at a distance. It was the equipment of the Turks that so distressed Senacherim. He finally decided that he could not defend his realm against the invaders and therefore ceded his kingdom to the Byzantine emperor in exchange for certain titles and estates.³⁹ It is clear that if the Byzantines were to succeed in repelling the Turks they would have to withstand the mobile archers better than the Armenians had done.

³⁸ Matthieu d'Edesse, *Chronique*, p. 41-42. For the location of Vaspurakan, see Ernst Honigmann, *Die Ostgrenze des byzantinischen Reiches* (Brussels, 1935), pp. 169-170. In general, Fr. Tournebize, *Histoire politique et religieuse de l'Arménie* (Paris, n.d.), pp. 123-124.

³⁹ Thomas Ardzrouni, *Histoire*, M. Brosset ed. and trans. in *Collection d'historiens arméniens*, 1 (St Petersburg, 1874), 248; René Grousset, *Histoire de l'Arménie des origines à 1071* (Paris, 1947), pp. 553 ff.; Honigmann, *Ostgrenze*, p. 168 f.

V

Meanwhile the Pechenegs were attacking the Byzantine empire's European frontiers. Leaving south Russia they penetrated and devastated Byzantine-held Bulgaria and Thrace. Like the eastern Turks they were skilled mounted archers. Their habitual use of the bow was mentioned by Michael Attaliates.⁴⁰ They became such a menace to the European provinces that Constantine IX (1042–1055) transferred some of the best Byzantine units from Anatolia to end their incursions. Constantine had some mounted archers to use against the Pechenegs,⁴¹ but from the account of Attaliates it appears that many Anatolian soldiers did not stand up well against the Pechenegs' archery:

Now, while the Pechenegs, covered by their wagons like a wall, awaited the attack of the Byzantines, certain of the Byzantine columns running and yelling charged toward the barbarians' camp. Those barbarians who used bows panicked the horses of their adversaries by the wounds that they inflicted and they forced the Byzantines to flee ignominiously. Each of them took care not to in effect lose his life by an unseen arrow and to be trampled underfoot by those others fleeing with him. A second engagement took place in which the Byzantines experienced a similar rout: the Byzantines fled, the Pechenegs hung on to them.⁴²

Again Attaliates emphasized in a later passage how his patron and later Emperor Nicephorus Botaniates was able to save his men from Pecheneg arrows during a retreat that took place in the reign of Constantine IX:

[Botaniates] ordered his men not to spread out like cattle as the rest of the men were seen to be doing and not to turn their backs to the enemy making themselves into targets for Pecheneg arrows, but to stay at his side and follow him at a leisurely pace in strong formation—an arrangement which could effectively resist the enemy. They agreed among themselves and trusted in the courage of their leader and confided to him their welfare and the responsibility for finding the right direction. Then Botaniates set out with them. The Pechenegs on seeing a small group which advanced in formation and in battle order, made a violent sortie against them. After having ridden around them many times, peppering them with arrows, they retired when they saw that it was impossible to disperse the Byzantines . . . Planning to deprive the Byzantines of their mounts, they shot down their horses with a mass of arrows discharged from a distance. They were unable to engage the Byzantines in hand-to-hand combat for having made trial of close fighting, they had, many times, lost a great number of men killed by Botaniates himself or his men.⁴³

These Byzantine troops were unable to make an effective reply to the Pechenegs' arrows; they had to await the arrows passively and hope their shields would stop the missiles.⁴⁴ On the other hand these soldiers did not lack courage but fought their best in close combat and in such engagements they were more than a match for the Pechenegs.

⁴⁰ An extensive bibliography on the Pechenegs is found in Moravcsik, *Byzantinoturcica*, I, 87–90. Attaliates describes the weapons of the Pechenegs in his *Historia*, p. 30.

⁴¹ Cedrenus-Skylitzes, *Historiarum compendium*, II, 602.

⁴² Attaliates, *Historia*, pp. 32–33.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 39–41.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

VI

Byzantine soldiers who fought the Seljuk Turks faced tactical difficulties similar to those which the Pechenegs posed. The Seljuks began seriously to menace the Byzantine eastern frontier during the late 1040's. This frontier ran roughly along the Araxes River and the territory between Lakes Van and Urmia. Border security was entrusted to the famous *akritai* or frontier guards.⁴⁵ The southeastern frontier started roughly at Lake Van, ran along the Upper Euphrates and terminated at Antioch-on-Orontes.⁴⁶ How were the Seljuks able to penetrate the defenses of these two frontiers to plunder the lightly-guarded interior of the Empire?

One of the most exposed themes on the eastern frontier was the Iberic which included the important city of Theodosiopolis (modern Erzerum).⁴⁷ Attaliates specifically attributed its devastation to the effect of excellent Turkish archery on the Byzantine defenders. In his account of Constantine IX's reign he declared,

This people, making continuous annual incursions, did great damage to Byzantine territory. The Byzantines entrusted with the frontiers (*hoi tōn akrōn epistatountes Rhomaioi*) who opposed them were beaten, for their adversaries were well acquainted with the bow, hit the mark not a little, and terrified their enemies with these wounds that they inflicted from a distance. Therefore they systematically overran all Iberia plundering the small towns and villages, ruining large cities and laying waste districts.⁴⁸

According to Attaliates, the Seljuks benefited from their use of archery in not merely one combat but in many engagements over a period of years. Attaliates then abruptly proceeds in a well-known passage to add another reason for the destruction of Iberia, Constantine IX's alienation of Byzantine soldiers by his withdrawal of their right to use public lands.⁴⁹ This particular point needs no further emphasis here; it has often been cited. Imperial neglect of the army coupled with the devastating quality of Turkish archery sealed the fate of Iberia. Attaliates' description of the Byzantine terror of the Turks' arrows parallels the fear that struck Senacherim's Armenian troops in the passage cited above from Matthew of Edessa.

In another significant passage Attaliates relates how the Seljuks were able to crack the southeastern frontier:

After the emperor [Constantine IX] died the Turks again overrunning the east in the vicinity of Mesopotamia lay in wait to attack the Byzantine troops camped around Melitene. These units, who were dejected and angry since their supplies were insufficient and they were in need of provisions, were even unable to join the Byzantine troops in

⁴⁵ For very general discussions of the *akritai*, see introduction to the epic *Digenes Akrites* by John Mavrogordato, the translator (Oxford, 1956); A. Rambaud, "Une épopée byzantine au X^e siècle: les exploits de Digénis Akritas," *Études sur l'histoire byzantine* (Paris, 1919), pp. 73 ff.; Henri Grégoire, *Ho Digenis Akritas* (New York, 1942).

⁴⁶ For a detailed discussion of the eastern and southeastern frontiers of the Byzantine empire, see Ernst Honigsmann, *Ostgrenze*, pp. 115-190. A recent survey of Byzantine army organization has been written by Hélène Glykatzis-Ahrweiler, *Recherches sur l'administration de l'empire byzantin au IX^e-XI^e siècles* (Paris, 1960).

⁴⁷ The location of the Byzantine province of "Iberia" is discussed by Honigsmann, *Ostgrenze*, pp. 161, 211.

⁴⁸ Attaliates, *Historia*, p. 44.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 44-45.

Mesopotamia, being unwilling to cross the Euphrates. Therefore the barbarians having approached through the river, these Byzantines spreading about its exit paths, opposed them. The barbarians, who were archers, easily wounded them from a distance while remaining uninjured themselves until they forced the Byzantines to enter the stream and join battle. But again, those Turks posted on the banks shot arrows at the Byzantines, mauled them very badly and compelled them to flee. A rout ensued; many Byzantines fell, others were captured alive, the survivors escaped to the city of Melitene.⁵⁰

Once more the Byzantines were unable to reply effectively to the Turkish archers from a distance; they were forced to risk an engagement at close quarters. This particular defeat had very serious consequences for the Byzantines. The Seljuks exploited their breakthrough and made a devastating raid, without further serious opposition, into Cappadocia and Cilicia.⁵¹

VII

The above evidence is fragmentary but it does show that at scattered points Turkish archery made an important contribution to the critical initial breaching of Byzantine frontier defenses. The open countryside was then exposed to destructive raids. There is evidence that at some other places the Byzantines possessed some archers who resisted the Turks.⁵² The Turks did not enjoy an absolute monopoly on the use of the bow and arrow.

Byzantine and Armenian sources indicate that skillful use of mounted archers contributed significantly to the Seljuk defeat and capture of Emperor Romanus IV Diogenes at the decisive battle of Manzikert on 26 August 1071.

In the skirmishing that preceded the battle the Seljuks showed that their mounted archers were more than a match man for man for the Byzantines. A Byzantine troop of adequate size, Attaliates emphasized, engaged some Turks, but since these Turks were archers they killed or wounded so many Byzantine soldiers that the commander Nicephorus Bryennius (a subsequent contender for the emperorsip) became terrified and appealed for more troops. Only with a much larger force was he able to drive off the Turks.⁵³

The Byzantines took some archers on this campaign. Their foot archers successfully defended their camp against Turkish attacks before the battle began.⁵⁴ Pecheneg and Uzz mercenaries were present in the Byzantine army; they were capable mounted archers. According to Matthew of Edessa, they formed the left and right wings of the army respectively at the battle itself. In the midst of the engagement, however, Matthew says that they deserted to the Turks.⁵⁵ This action deprived the Byzantines of skillful mounted archers who knew how to fight the Turks with their own methods and weapons. The center of the Byzantine army was then exposed to the Turkish archers who encircled them. Another Armenian historian, Aristakis of Lastiverd, believed that the Seljuk archers played a

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

⁵² Cedrenus-Skylitzes, *Historiarum compendium*, II, 592.

⁵³ In general, see Claude Cahen, "La Campagne de Mantzikert d'après les sources musulmanes," *Byzantion*, IX (1934), 613-642. The preliminary skirmish is described by Attaliates, *Historia*, p. 154.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

⁵⁵ Matthew of Edessa, *Chronique*, p. 169; also, Attaliates, *Historia*, p. 157.

prominent role in the outcome of the battle. In attempting to exonerate some Armenian soldiers from charges of desertion during the conflict, he claimed that "without fearing the strong Persian [Turkish] archers, they resisted with manly energy and without turning their backs."⁵⁶

Byzantine sources also indicate that Turkish archery made a contribution to the outcome. According to Attaliates, the fact that the Turks were archers affected a critical tactical decision made by Romanus. A decisive point in the battle occurred when the emperor, who had been pursuing the elusive Turks, resolved to order an end to the pursuit and a return to his base. An important factor in his calculations was the fear of a counterattack by Turk archers⁵⁷ which emphasizes his healthy respect for them. His decision to retire is significant because in Attaliates' account the orderly Byzantine withdrawal quickly turns into a rout due to treachery. Thus the fact that the Turks were formidable archers was one among a chain of factors contributing to the emperor's defeat.⁵⁸

The Caesar Nicephorus Bryennius, writing several decades after the battle, also attributed an important role to Seljuk archery in determining the final defeat and capture of the emperor, although his account differs from that of the other historians:

Taranges [eunuch of the Seljuk Sultan Alp Arslan] divided the Turkish army into many groups and devised ambushes and traps and ordered his men to surround the Byzantines and to discharge a rain of arrows against them from all sides. The Byzantines, seeing their horses struck by arrows, were forced to pursue the Turks. They followed the Turks who pretended to flee. But they suffered heavily when they fell into ambushes and traps. The emperor, having resolved to accept a general engagement, slowly advanced hoping to find an army of Turks, attack it and decide the battle, but the Turks scattered. But wheeling, with great strength and shouting, they attacked the Byzantines and routed their right wing. Immediately the rear guard withdrew. The Turks encircled the emperor and shot from all directions. They prevented the left wing from coming to the rescue for they got in its rear and forced it to flee. The emperor, completely deserted and cut off from aid, drew his sword against the enemy and killed many and compelled them to flee. But encircled by the mass of the enemy, he was struck in the hand and recognized and surrounded on all sides. His horse was hit by an arrow, slipped and fell, and threw down his rider. And in this manner the Byzantine emperor was made prisoner . . .⁵⁹

Bryennius' account illustrates how skillful use of archery gave the Seljuks the initiative in the battle. Apparently the Byzantine cavalry described in this passage was not armed with bows. It was provoked into making a hasty attack against the Turks to stop the showers of arrows which were picking off its horses.

VIII

In the decade that followed the battle of Manzikert the Seljuks overran most of

⁵⁶ Aristakis of Lastiverd, *Histoire d'Arménie*, E. Prud'homme trans. (Paris, 1864), p. 144.

⁵⁷ Attaliates, *Historia*, p. 161.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 161-163.

⁵⁹ Nicephorus Bryennius, *Commentarii*, pp. 41-42. "Thus Romanus Diogenes, like Crassus of old, paid the penalty for attacking a swarm of horse-archers in a open rolling country, where he had cover neither for his flanks nor for his rear," Sir Charles Oman, *A History of the Art of War in the Middle Ages*, 2nd ed. (London, 1924), I, 221.

Anatolia. The Byzantine army as a whole was shattered although a few units attempted to stem the invasion. Alexius Comnenus was able to secure some archers who briefly repulsed the Turks in a small action,⁶⁰ but scattered references in Byzantine sources indicate that extensive and skillful use of the bow continued to be an important Turkish asset. During the reign of Michael VII (1071–1078) Alexius Comnenus was nearly killed by Turkish arrows when he attempted to engage his foes with a lance; his horse was shot from under him.⁶¹ The Frankish mercenary chief Roussel de Bailleul and his men were armed with lances in another engagement. They attempted to ward off some attacking Turks. The Turks, plying their bows, killed the Franks' horses and wounded and captured Roussel and his men.⁶²

The Byzantines themselves appreciated the effectiveness of the Turks with the bow and began hiring them as mercenaries. It is as archers that these mercenaries quickly proved their value in the civil war between the imperial pretender, Nicephorus Bryennius, and the Emperor Nicephorus Botaniates. The battle of Kalovryia in Thrace settled the contest in favor of the latter. It was Botaniates' Turkish archers who arrived on the battlefield at the critical moment and determined the outcome of the conflict:

Immediately with a war-whoop the Turks let their arrows fly and the commanders of the units [of Bryennius] remained stunned by the suddenness of the event. But since they were men experienced in warfare, they strove to reestablish order, urging the brave part of their men to show enough courage to win over the others. After a while they reformed ranks and attacked the Turks bravely.

But the Turks, fleeing precipitously, attracted them toward prepared ambushes until they had almost reached the first ambush. When the Turks reached it, they themselves turned around and those in ambush swiftly ran out and shot the Byzantines with arrows, inflicting casualties on both men and horses.⁶³

By this combination of expert archery and ambushes the Turks eventually routed the partisans of Bryennius and captured Bryennius himself.

Appreciating the importance of archery, the Byzantines in the closing years of the eleventh century (after virtually all of Anatolia was lost) not only hired Turkish archers but also strove to bring the skill of their own archers up to decent standards. In 1090/1 Alexius Comnenus, according to his daughter Anna, gave instructions to those of his men who had some acquaintance with the bow. He instructed them on how they must hold their bows and send their arrows.⁶⁴ By the accession of Manuel Comnenus in 1143 the Byzantines had made the bow and arrow the principal weapon for their troops.⁶⁵ By then, of course, it was too late: the Turks had consolidated their control over most of Anatolia.

⁶⁰ Nicephorus Bryennius, *Commentarii*, pp. 67–69.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

⁶² Attaliates, *Historia*, p. 191.

⁶³ Nicephorus Bryennius, *Commentarii*, pp. 141–142.

⁶⁴ Anne Comnène, *Alexiade*, II, B. Leib ed. and trans. (Paris, 1943), 121.

⁶⁵ John Cinnamus, *Epitome rerum ab Ioanne et Alexio Comnenis gestarum*, A. Meineke ed. (Bonn, 1836), p. 125.

IX

It is not astonishing that the Turks were able to overrun Anatolia in the eleventh century. In the ninth century they had, in the service of Caliph Mu'tašim, first met and defeated the Byzantines in combat by means of their archery. The Byzantine chroniclers were impressed by their skill and recorded it. In the eleventh century the Turks reappeared on their own. Again the Byzantine and Armenian sources were struck by their ability to use the bow accurately and rapidly from horseback; such writers as Attaliates attributed important Turkish successes to their skillful handling of this weapon. The Byzantines were often forced to charge through a hail of Turkish arrows to engage the Turks at close quarters. The Turks picked off Byzantines and Armenians from a safe distance while sometimes remaining uninjured themselves.⁶⁶ It appears that an important reason for the Byzantine empire's employment of Pecheneg, Cuman, and later even Turkish mercenaries — so often condemned by modern writers — was the recognized need to secure sufficient well trained mounted archers to fight the invading Turks on their own terms. It is clear from the sources that there were some archers in the Byzantine army but in some of the combats described in this essay it appears that there were no Byzantine mounted archers — or at least an insufficient number — present to oppose the Turkish ones. It is impossible, given the fragmentary records, to determine with any accuracy how often a complete disparity existed in Byzantine-Seljuk engagements. What is certain is that Byzantine and Armenian sources clearly ascribe a number of critical Seljuk military victories to the Turks' skillful handling of the bow. Extensive use of able mounted archers helped the Turks wrest Anatolia from the Byzantines in the eleventh century just as it had once served Justinian's generals in their conquest of Italy from the Ostrogoths. One would not maintain that Turkish excellence in archery was the single cause for the Seljuk conquest of Anatolia. But it seems to have been an important and hitherto unnoticed military factor, which, combined with the social, economic and political weaknesses of Byzantium which Byzantinists have uncovered, operated to enable the Seljuks to overcome Byzantine resistance.⁶⁷

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⁶⁶ For a general discussion of Turkish tactics, see R. C. Smail, *Crusading Warfare, 1097-1193*, pp. 75-83.

⁶⁷ I wish to acknowledge with deep gratitude the very helpful advice and encouragement of Professors Robert Lee Wolff and Stanford J. Shaw and Dr Charles T. Wood.